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ABSTRACT

In response to the increasing need of rural public schools for teachers who can function in more than one teaching area, Arkansas College initiated a program for students to become certified in both special education and elementary education. Through this dual, 4-year program, the employment prospects of students are increased, the needs of area schools are met, and the effort to provide quality teacher training is furthered. The students learn in-depth theories for teaching elementary math, science, economics, reading, social studies, music, and art. In the special education courses, strong emphasis is placed on human growth and development, assessment, individualized instruction, and behavior modification strategies. Both the elementary education teacher and the special education teacher benefit from the materials and methods of the dual curriculum, making for stronger, more flexible teachers.
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Teaching in Rural America: Dual Certification, A Redefinition of Regular and Special Education Roles

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ABSTRACT

This paper will describe one school's effort to address an increasing need that is found across the United States for teachers to work both in special and elementary education. The paper will describe the formulations and planning for this dual certification track, and describe the courses included in the program.

Rural schools comprise 67 percent of all schools in the United States. One third of all students live in rural America. A predominant number of teacher preparation programs do not adequately prepare teachers to meet the unique challenges of teaching in rural areas.

Numerous small public school systems are in the geographic area served by Arkansas College. These schools need teachers who can teach in more than one area. Arkansas College is initiating an option for students to become certified in both special education and elementary education through a dual, four-year program. This option serves as a model or point of consideration for other small colleges that serve similar rural student populations.

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"Teaching in Rural America: Dual Certification,
A Redefinition of Regular and Special Education Roles"

INTRODUCTION:

An increasing need of the public schools across the United States is employing teachers who can function in more than one teaching area. This need for teachers with multiple teaching areas is especially acute for the rural schools because a predominant number of teacher preparation programs do not adequately prepare teachers to meet the increased individual demands of teaching in rural areas, and the majority of state certification laws do not recognize the unique personnel needs of rural areas. These teachers who have the abilities and training to teach in more than one area are especially sought after by the rural schools.

Ferrara, Hirshoren, Levin (1983) determined that one of the most difficult problems facing state education agencies is that of providing for special education services in rural areas. One third of all students live in rural America, and rural schools comprise 67 percent of all schools in the United States. These schools are an important part of the culture of the rural family structure. Rural areas pose unique challenges for schools such as high transportation costs, difficulties of obtaining specialized services and low tax bases. Resistance to change, funding, and distances between schools are major obstacles to providing special education services in rural schools.

Across the nation, one particularly acute problem for rural schools is a personnel shortage. Rural schools report that the recruiting and retaining of qualified staff are significant impediments to providing services (Helge, 1983). In very few other areas of certification are there as many available employment opportunities as there are today in the field of Special Education. One study by the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services of the U.S. Department of Education revealed that approximately 57,250 additional teachers are needed to provide special education for all school-age children and youth who require it.

One reason for poor staff retention in rural areas is the inappropriate preservice training many teachers receive. With the increased trend toward mainstreaming our special education population, many elementary education teachers are often required to serve a special population for which they have little or no training (Bullock, 1985; Ferrara, et. al. 1983). To remedy this deficit in instructional training, we have historically relied

heavily on inservice programs to train teachers how to work with special needs students. Seldom has this "first aid" approach worked. Instead a well-planned curriculum with thorough instruction needs to be implemented at the preservice training level.

Sesow and Adams' (1982) research indicated a positive correlation between the amount of special education training and receptive attitudes about mainstreaming. The teachers surveyed felt competent in their preparation to teach special children when those teachers had received sufficient coursework instruction in that area. Flynn, et. al (1978) in a follow-up study of their education graduates found that even those teachers that felt a need for further special education course work were reluctant to return to college for that training. Thus without appropriate preservice coursework, many elementary education teachers lack the appropriate training to work with the special education population which those educators will face in their classrooms (Bullock, 1985).

Attitudes of elementary education teachers are key variables to successful mainstreaming. The teacher's perception of competency is the key to their attitudes (Leyser & Abrams, 1983, Leyser, Abrams, Lipscomb, 1982; Sesow & Adams, 1982). The more "prepared" a teacher feels to teach special students, the more positive the teacher's attitudes (Larrivee, 1981). The importance for thorough teacher preparation cannot be underestimated.

MEETING THE PROBLEM:

An important role teacher educators play in our society is to stay abreast of the current needs of local school systems. In the geographic areas served by most colleges and universities, there are numerous, small, public school systems. These schools need teachers who can teach in more than one area of certification. Many of our rural schools desperately need the flexibility to utilize teachers in more than one teaching area (Carlsen and Dunne, 1981). Many do not need a full-time special education teacher, but instead a teacher who can teach in this area for a portion of the day and work in another area for the balance of the day.

Having a teacher who is capable of teaching in both special and elementary classes gives the rural schools the option to have a teacher teach 1/2 special education and 1/2 time in the elementary classroom. This capability provides the rural schools with more flexibility in staffing. Teachers may also avoid the burn-out tendency because of the option to teach in a variety of environments.

Requests from area schools which increase the employment prospects of students and a desire to further good teaching have resulted in the initiation of this dual training program. This program fuses special education with elementary education. The program increases the employment prospect of students, meets the needs of our area schools, and furthers the effort to provide quality teacher training.

This dual program is one means by which both elementary and special education teachers can become more adept teachers. The dual training not only increases the elementary teacher's effectiveness, but also the

special education teachers will be better prepared to work with students in the mainstream. These teachers will know what the elementary and special education teachers expect from the student and can better understand how to make the transition between elementary and special education a successful experience. This makes one large step toward the merger of special and elementary education as suggested in the literature (Stainback and Stainback, 1984). (Appendix 1 details the course requirements for this dual program.)

SPECIFIC LEARNINGS FROM DUAL PROGRAM OPTION:

The literature suggests that rural special educators will need to have the skills to address a very heterogeneous population (Ferrara, et. al., 1983). Arkansas trains and certifies special education teachers in a non-categorical fashion. Non-categorical refers to a teaching certificate which includes mild handicaps in mental retardation, learning disabilities, and behavior disorders. This helps rural communities that may have only a few in each category of mildly retarded, learning disabled, and/or behavior disordered students. The Characteristics of the Mildly Handicapped course and the Methods and Materials of Exceptional Child course focus directly into all three mildly handicapping areas.

For the special education teacher, a great advantage of this program is the coordination of efforts between special and elementary education (Bullock, 1985; Kopit, 1982). The students learn in-depth theories for teaching elementary math, science, economics, reading, social studies, music and art. The emphasis in the special education courses can then be one of application of the above strategies for mildly handicapped students. More time can be spent with specific techniques relevant to the student's special needs rather than spending a great deal of time teaching the foundations of each subject area. This cooperation between special and elementary education is essential to best train all teachers to meet the needs of our students (Stainback and Stainback, 1984).

A great advantage for the elementary teacher is the strong emphasis on human growth and development, assessment, and behavior modification strategies. The elementary teacher receives a thorough knowledge of strategies used in special education to be able to meet the needs of the special education students in the regular class. The confidence of adequate training has a positive effect on attitudes about mainstreaming (Hoover & Sakofs, 1985). Through the dual curriculum, elementary teachers will experience a strong emphasis in special education assessment, individualized instruction, legislation and the law, Individual Educational Plans, behavior management techniques, parental involvement, public relations, and career education.

Both the elementary education teacher and the special education teacher benefit from the materials and methods of the dual curriculum, making a stronger more flexible teacher (Carlsen & Dunne, 1981). This has been found true in rural schools where teachers need to be flexible and capable of teaching in many areas. This dual program does not emphasize "a jack of all trades or master of none" approach, but instead a master of two very important areas, elementary and special education.

An example of one of the specific areas covered within the dual curriculum is the importance of knowing oneself. One must be aware of the aspects of one's personality needed for rural special education. Questions probe personality factors such as: Do you like small towns? What do you value in your home environment? Does isolation bother you? Do you like knowing your neighbors well and their knowing you well? Can you work with diverse student populations?

We also deal directly with the public relation role of special educators and their need to get along with other teachers. In rural schools, all teacher must play a number of roles. The special education teacher must serve as teacher, liaison, consultant, counselor, etc. It is vital that the special education teacher, even when not required, should volunteer for hall duty, lunch duty, just like the elementary education teachers. Emphasis is placed on extra-curricular activities. Elementary education teachers should also express interest in special education activities.

Another example is the emphasis placed on career education. Teachers need to obtain knowledge about the rural community and what jobs are available for students. Cooperation with local employers is strongly stressed.

CONCLUSION:

It is time in our teacher preparation programs to address the needs of rural schools for teachers who can teach in more than one area. It is time to identify the particular needs of training teachers for working in rural areas and developing a well-planned curriculum of appropriate pre-service training. Implementation of appropriate training should aid in retention of personnel in rural areas and assist with providing the required special education services for these rural schools. It is time to provide a redefinition of the roles of elementary and special education teachers. In training teachers for working in rural settings, the traditional roles merge. Broadly-based training programs provide educators with the skills, knowledge, and attitudes to work in a variety of teaching situations. Teachers with this broadly-based training will aid the rural schools in delivering quality instruction to their students. Perhaps this dual program option can serve as a point of consideration for other small colleges that prepare teachers for service in largely rural geographic areas.

Name _____
Catalog Year _____

ACADEMIC PROGRAM
CHECK SHEET
B.A.

ELEMENTARY EDUCATION/SPECIAL EDUCATION
1986-87

CORE CURRICULUM 25 Credits

T.C.	Req.	
—	1	Cor 100 Personal Develop. Seminar
—	3	Eng 101 Freshman Composition I
—	3	Eng 102 Freshman Composition II
—	1	Ped 100 Physical Fitness I
—	1	Ped 101-120 Any Activity Courses
—	3	Rph 200 Intro to the Bible
—	3	Eng 223 or 224 Masterpieces of the Western World I & II
—	3	Pls 101 U.S. Gov't in Perspective
—	3	Sci 100 Biology
—	4	Sci 110 Physical Science

OTHER LIBERAL ARTS REQUIREMENTS 39 Credits

—	3	Sci 314 or Eco 311 (ED 311 or 314 Geography)
—	3	ENG Speech correction or a [language development] course
—	3	PED 340 Adaptive Physical Education
—	3	PSY 310 Developmental Psychology I
—	3	PSY 311 Development Psychology II
—	3	PSY 330 Behavior Modification
—	3	Sth 101 Basic Speech Communication
—	3	Psy 101 Intro to Psychology
—	3	PE 202 Health & Safety
—	3	His 250 or 251 U.S. History
—	3	ART 270 Art for Elem Teachers
—	3	MUS 227 Music for the Grades
—	3	Psy 302 Ed Psychology

ELEMENTARY EDUCATION COURSE REQUIREMENTS 39 Credits

T.C.	Req.	
—	3	ED 200 Math for Elem Teachers
—	3	ED 201 Science for Elem Teachers
—	3	ED 207 Econ for Elem Teachers
—	3	ED 300 School & Society
—	3	ED 312 Children's Literature
—	3	ED 313 Teaching Social Studies
—	3	ED 315 Elementary Methods
—	3	ED 316 Reading Methods
—	3	ED 317 Diag. of Reading
—	3	ED 318 T. Language Arts
—	3	ED 342 Math Methods
—	6	ED 442 Directed Teaching

SPECIAL EDUCATION COURSE REQUIREMENTS 18 Credits

—	3	SPE 270 Intro to Exceptional Children
—	3	SPE 343 Characteristics of the Mildly Handicapped
—	3	SPE 346 Methods & Materials for Exceptional Children
—	3	SPE 428 Evaluation of Exceptional Children
—	6	SPE 443 Directed Practicum

GENERAL ELECTIVES (Credits to total 128)

Endorsement/s		
—	—	—
—	—	—
—	—	—
—	—	—
—	—	—

Please note: If you plan to teach in the elementary school you are not required to complete: Mth. 101, His. 210 and His. 211.

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